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ABSTRACT

Eleven Talent Search (TS) projects and six Educational Opportunity Centers (EOC) were evaluated. Designed to increase college enrollment by low-income youth and adults, these federal programs provide students information, counseling, and other support. Recommendations for national policymakers, U.S. Department of Education officials, and local project administrators are included. Data sources include: census data, program performance data for 1979-1982, and partial data for 1982-1983; funding proposals and reports, and questionnaire and interview data. After briefly tracing program histories and obstacles to access for the disadvantaged, information is provided on clients, services, staffing, and organization of the programs. In evaluating program success, problems in reporting and interpreting information to measure program effectiveness are addressed. It is concluded that service delivery has increasingly been cost-effective and professional and various strategies have helped diverse clients achieve educational access. However, a consistent approach to performance reporting is needed to strengthen the case for continuing support of programs and to improve service delivery. Appended is a list of the TS projects and EOC centers, the sponsoring institutions, start dates, and target groups. (SW)

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Helping Disadvantaged Youth and Adults Enter College:

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Federal Programs

Paul L. Franklin

The Washington Office
of the College Board

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Federal Programs**

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**The Washington Office
of the College Board**

**College Entrance Examination Board
1985**

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Foreword

In the past two decades, the federal government has taken major steps to help disadvantaged people participate more fully in the nation's economic and social life, including the opportunity to get a college education. While authorizing programs of financial aid for students, Congress also recognized that the disadvantaged face unique problems that decrease their probability of even considering enrollment in postsecondary institutions. Two programs, Talent Search and Educational Opportunity Centers, emerged under the Higher Education Act to provide information, counseling, encouragement, and other support to low-income youth and adults to improve their chances of college enrollment.

Have these programs helped advance the goal of equal educational opportunity? How do these programs serve their clients, and how could they be more effective? What improvements could be made in the legislation and regulations governing the programs?

This study is based on data and interviews from a sample of Talent Search and Educational Opportunity Center projects. Recommendations based on the findings are directed to the Congress, the U.S. Department of Education, and the administrators of such projects.

There are many success stories in the Talent Search and Educational Opportunity Center programs, and some of them are reported in this paper. The study concludes that the programs have delivered services in an increasingly cost-effective and professional manner, that individual projects have tailored a variety of strategies to help their diverse clients overcome obstacles to educational opportunity, and that demographic trends in the next decade will increase the need for such support services for the disadvantaged, both youth and adults. The report notes, however, that inconsistencies and deficiencies in federally-required performance reporting hamper the type of definitive, data-based assessment that these programs deserve. A consistent and comprehensive approach to gathering placement and other performance data across projects, the study suggests, would strengthen the case for continuing support of the programs and could reveal ways to improve service delivery. This and other recommendations are elaborated in the report.

Paul Franklin, a former Talent Search project director and now an educational policy consultant, conducted the study and prepared this report, with editorial assistance from Pamela Christoffel, Richard A. Lacey, and Carol H. Shulman. Diane Erving patiently typed the various drafts, and Anna Fuller carefully proofread the manuscript.

A number of other people provided information and assistance, in particular: Arnold Mitchem, executive director of the National Council of Educational Opportunity Associations (NCEOA); Maureen Hoyler, deputy director of NCEOA; and Jose Longoria, executive director of the National Education Service Centers of the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC). Finally, we wish to thank the directors of the Talent Search projects and Educational Opportunity Centers surveyed in the course of the study. They were all extremely cooperative and helpful.

Lawrence E. Gladieux
Executive Director

iii

Contents

FOREWORD	iii
INTRODUCTION	1
HOW THIS STUDY WAS CONDUCTED	2
PROGRAM HISTORY	3
OBSTACLES TO ACCESS FOR THE DISADVANTAGED	4
CLIENTS, SERVICES, AND EFFECTIVENESS	6
THE CONTINUING NEED FOR SERVICES	15
RECOMMENDATIONS	17
REFERENCES	20
APPENDIX—LISTS OF SAMPLE TALENT SEARCH PROJECTS AND EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY CENTERS	21

**Helping
Disadvantaged
Youth and Adults
Enter College**

Introduction

Educational opportunity is part of the promise of America. It has traditionally represented hope for a better life—for both the individual and society.

National policies of the past 20 years have supported broader access to higher education through a substantial investment in programs that help students meet tuition and other college expenses. When it passed the Higher Education Act of 1965, however, Congress recognized that financial aid alone would not necessarily open the doors of higher education to all who are qualified. Therefore the Act also authorized programs to provide information, counseling, encouragement, and other services to help equalize college opportunities for the disadvantaged.

Two federal programs that provide such support are Talent Search (TS), which targets youth, and Educational Opportunity Centers (EOCs), which primarily target adults.¹ The programs operate through discretionary grants made by the U.S. Department of Education. Although available appropriations enable TS projects and EOCs to serve less than 5 percent of those eligible, these programs were responsible for placing an estimated 20 percent of all minority freshmen who entered college in 1982 (Committee on Education and Labor 1982).

Except for a study of the Talent Search program a decade ago (Pyecha et al. 1974), there has been no major analysis of these federal efforts. Exactly who are their clients? How and why do these programs differ in offering and delivering specific services? How solid is the evidence that these programs are succeeding in addressing a national need by overcoming barriers to their clients' college enrollment? How can they be designed or managed more effectively? Can the legislation and regulations governing these programs be improved?

1. Together with two other federal programs, Upward Bound and Special Services, these programs are known collectively as the Special Programs for Students from Disadvantaged Backgrounds, commonly called TRIO programs despite their number.

How This Study Was Conducted

This investigation of selected Talent Search projects and Educational Opportunity Centers is intended to describe the goals, operations, clients, staffing, and services of these federal programs; to assess how well they are accomplishing their aims; to gauge the need for such programs in the decade ahead; and to make recommendations for national policymakers, U.S. Department of Education (ED) officials, and local project administrators.

This study relied upon the following sources of information:

1. Census data, demographic analysis, and general research on access to higher education.
2. Annual performance data on the two programs collected by ED for 1979 through 1982, and partial data for 1982-83.
3. Copies of funding proposals, client record-keeping forms, evaluations, and other reports from 1979 through 1982 from the 17 selected projects.
4. Written survey and telephone interview data from eleven TS and six EOC projects selected by five criteria: age and racial composition of client populations; variations in duration of projects; agencies, organizations, and institutions that sponsor projects; project settings, rural and urban; and the size of projects, particularly by grant size and numbers of clients served.

Three additional criteria for selecting TS projects were: (1) to select one project from each of the ten federal regions nationwide; (2) to select at least one project that operates statewide; and (3) to select one of the eleven centers operated by the League of United Latin American Citizens National Educational Service Centers, the largest TS grantee.

All told, the 17 selected projects (listed in the Appendix) represent all regions in the nation and reflect major similarities and differences that exist among all projects.

The report is organized as follows:

- a brief history of the programs;
- analysis of obstacles to access for the disadvantaged, gleaned from the investigation of TS and EOC operations;
- description of the clients, services, and organization of these programs;
- evaluation of program success;
- problems in reporting and interpreting information to measure program effectiveness;
- discussion of the continuing need for TS and EOC services; and
- recommendations.

Program History

In 1966 Congress appropriated \$2 million to fund 42 experimental Talent Search projects under the Higher Education Act. Congressional intent was to provide services designed to encourage and assist disadvantaged youth to pursue and finance a college education by means of the first federal need-based student grant program, Educational Opportunity Grants. From the beginning, therefore, TS has been seen as a critical adjunct to student aid programs.

The average TS grant size of \$49,000 in the first year permitted projects to serve a total of 50,000 clients at an average cost of \$42 per client. Little growth occurred among TS projects until fiscal year 1978; their number then grew rapidly to a peak of 167 projects in 1982, serving nearly 200,000 people with an allocation of \$17 million, or \$86 per client. Decreased federal allocations in fiscal year 1982 resulted in three fewer TS projects in 1982-83.

Educational Opportunity Centers were established by the Education Amendments of 1972; \$3 million supported 12 Educational Opportunity Centers nationwide in fiscal year 1974. These centers are intended to promote postsecondary education throughout communities with low-income populations. EOCs have adapted their strategies to serve the immediate needs of their clients, low-income adults from diverse personal and educational circumstances. Some EOCs have helped long-term and recently unemployed clients to identify educational and training opportunities geared to currently marketable skills, a strategy intended to enable clients to understand and complete the connection between education and employment. The number of EOCs has not increased as greatly as TS projects; in 1982, 33 EOCs served approximately 109,000 individuals.

The Education Amendments of 1980 modified both programs in an attempt to make eligibility criteria more uniform and to remove concern about overlap between TS and EOCs. The 1980 legislation targeted the former on low-income and first-generation-in-college students age 12 to 27, the latter on similarly eligible adults age 19 or older.

Two-thirds of TS and EOC clients must be both low-income and first-generation college students. A "low-income family" is one whose income does not exceed 150 percent of the Bureau of Census poverty level, and a first-generation college student is one whose natural or adoptive parents have not completed a baccalaureate degree. The Amendments also permit individual TS projects to serve adults who have no EOC in their service area and EOCs to serve youth who have no TS program in their area.

Obstacles to Access for the Disadvantaged

Low-income and first-generation-in-college youth and adults encounter characteristic problems that TS and EOC information, counseling, and related support services are intended to address. The following observations regarding such problems have been gleaned from the investigation of TS and EOC operations. Although many of the problems are common to both low-income youth and adults, several are distinctly related to age and associated attributes.

Disadvantaged *youth* lack information networks that are usually available to middle class youth. The middle class has relatively greater access to resources in the local school system, in the community of business and professional people, and from family and peers. Regardless of their race, ethnicity, or location, disadvantaged youth usually encounter five problems:

1. School guidance counselors either overlook them or are unavailable in their high schools. These students are neither placed in nor encouraged to enroll in college preparatory classes. They receive minimal information or help in considering postsecondary education.
2. Most do not get encouragement or support from home for enrollment in college. Parents and students lack information about available financial support for college, and many parents believe that immediate employment is preferable to college.
3. They are rarely aware of the range of available postsecondary programs, academic and other requirements for admission, and related costs. For lack of knowledge, many disadvantaged students view higher education as an impossible dream.
4. TS clients lack exposure to career options and have vague career aspirations. They often fail to understand the importance of high school course selection and of academic requirements for college preparation or do not perceive them as relevant to their career interests.
5. Rural and urban youth are isolated from sources of information about and support for opportunities in higher education.

The cultural isolation of *rural* youth affects their value systems and aspirations. Even those who overcome local prejudices against the value of higher education frequently feel bound to the area and believe that attractive alternatives elsewhere are not available to them.

Urban youth are often so isolated within neighborhoods that even educational options that are relatively close at hand can seem alien and inaccessible.

Low-income and first-generation-in-college *adults* encounter an array of barriers to their participation in postsecondary education. Although some of these obstacles

resemble problems encountered by disadvantaged youth, different support services are required to enable adults to overcome them. Five problems are characteristic:

1. Disadvantaged adults do not know their specific strengths or abilities. They might sense that education could help them to change their situations, but do not know about educational opportunities that might be appropriate and accessible to them.
2. Many are on public assistance or are unemployed. They have few job skills. Many solely seek short-term programs in order to gain specific job skills and obtain employment as soon as possible.
3. Most are unaware of how much postsecondary education costs. Because they believe that financial aid programs are available only to the young, they often do not realize that they are eligible for assistance. Furthermore, they do not understand how to apply for aid.
4. Many lack support systems to pursue education, particularly such resources as child care, transportation, and encouragement from their families.
5. They lack confidence in their ability to learn or to compete with younger students.

Clients, Services, and Effectiveness

Talent Search Clients

Collectively, Talent Search projects serve a highly diverse population of low-income and first-generation-in-college youth, as can be seen in Table 1. Individually, the projects attempt to focus their services on local groups that have been demonstrably shortchanged in educational opportunities. Race and ethnicity are often major dimensions for defining these groups because many projects have been initiated by organizations that assist a racial or ethnic group located in their community. Even projects initiated by postsecondary institutions often focus on a particular underserved group in the local area.

How Talent Search Projects Organize and Deliver Services

Projects deliver services according to two strategies:

1) The prevailing approach is long-term and developmental. It reflects the concern that without early intervention—that is, encouragement, counseling, and other support for students in the early high school years, sometimes before (as early as seventh grade)—most disadvantaged students would be lost to postsecondary education because they would select inappropriate high school courses and downgrade their college aspirations. Many would be likely to drop out of high school. The developmental strategy used by most of the TS projects in the survey is based on a tightly designed, sequential package that compensates for the lack of services in the schools and community. Most of the projects serve a mixed age group, starting with clients early in high school, assisting them by strengthening academic motivation and academic background, and following them through postsecondary matriculation.

The Talent Search project operated by the Vermont Student Assistance Corporation, for example, employs this service strategy. The project starts with clients as high school freshmen, providing a series of career exploration and decision-making workshops. Workshops for sophomores build on first-year activities, introducing clients to collegiate programs and institutions that correspond to their individual career interests. Clients are also counseled to take appropriate college preparatory courses. As juniors and seniors, clients receive direct assistance in narrowing their postsecondary program and institutional choices and in filling out admission, financial aid, and other necessary applications.

The Florida A&M TS project uses a similar service approach. The director noted that in the Tallahassee area many disadvantaged students drop out of school because of inadequate guidance in junior high and the early years of high school, or because they do not acquire the requisite academic background for college. College-ready seniors, even those who are disadvantaged, represent the “cream” and would probably enter higher education institutions regardless of the TS project. Therefore to change the situation, the Florida A&M TS staff intervene as early as possible in the disadvantaged student’s school career. The need in the Tallahassee area is to identify, encourage, and assist potentially able students as early as possible and provide special support services to them until they enroll in postsecondary institutions.

2) In some locations, however, TS project directors have felt an urgent need to compensate for the lack of college guidance services in the schools—a lack so severe

Table 1. Average Racial Composition for TS Projects in Study versus All Projects, 1981-82.

	<u>Indian/ Alaskan</u>	<u>Asian/ Pacific</u>	<u>Black</u>	<u>Hispanic</u>	<u>White</u>
Projects in Study	3.7%	2.7%	25.5%	26.9%	36.8%
All TS Projects	3.9%	6.9%	41.3%	19.7%	31.4%

that they believe they must focus their limited resources on high school seniors and recent graduates. Interviews indicated that a decision to adopt this response to immediate short-range needs of college-ready students does not mean that such a strategy is considered preferable to the developmental approach. Rather, the view is that if seniors and recent graduates are not served, hardly anyone in the target group will enroll in postsecondary education. The fundamental issue for TS projects in such places as San Antonio is how to deploy limited resources in the face of great need.

The contrast in these two service strategies is in the age mix and educational status of those served, as demonstrated in Table 2.

Thus the study found that sample TS projects consciously choose to serve specific groups of disadvantaged youth, determined locally to be most in need of assistance. Then they develop specific service strategies to meet those needs. This finding suggests maturation of Talent Search since the 1974 evaluation by Pyecha et al., which found projects serving virtually anyone who sought assistance, with little overall coherence in approach.

Within a range of different approaches, however, all TS projects provide a core set of services for seniors. They are:

- support for finishing high school and pursuing postsecondary education;
- information and counseling for choosing an appropriate postsecondary educational alternative;
- information on admissions requirements and financial aid programs; and
- assistance in completing and submitting admission and financial aid applications.

In addition, TS projects usually provide career counseling and follow-up with postsecondary institutions, checking on the status of admission, financial aid, and actual enrollment of clients.

A frequent method of providing services in such areas as career development and decision making is the use of small group sessions that resemble instructional classes.

**Table 2. Demonstration of Two TS Models in Targeting Services:
Percentage of Clients by Educational Status, 1981-82**

	<u>Junior High</u>	<u>Grades 9-11</u>	<u>Seniors</u>	<u>Graduates 17-27</u>	<u>Dropouts 14-27</u>	<u>College Dropouts</u>
Project STAY, San Antonio, TX	0%	0%	64%	7%	0%	29%
Florida A&M, Tallahassee	3%	58%	36%	1%	3%	0%

Clients are usually seen at least four times a year, and project staff usually obtain admission forms and financial aid application materials for clients. Surprisingly, only three of the projects surveyed also obtain test-fee waivers.

All of the projects in the study develop and maintain relationships with admission and financial aid offices. Staff agree that good relationships are key to obtaining adequate financial aid for all clients. Some staff also think that a sense of mutual trust and confidence between staff and admissions officers can give an edge to clients applying to selective colleges. The Department of Education has found that about half of matriculated TS clients are enrolled in four-year institutions—significant, considering the disproportionate enrollment of minorities in community colleges nationwide (Astin et al. 1982).

Sponsors of TS projects have been supportive. The study unearthed no sign that any campus-based TS projects are pressured to act as institutional recruiters.

TS projects surveyed provide a common set of core services that are so labor-intensive that virtually 99 percent of funds are devoted to providing clients with support and encouragement to finish high school and pursue higher education. (Data in the study confirmed that some TS projects expend only one percent of grant funds for support materials.)

TS projects have been unable to keep pace with inflation. Although TS projects spent ten real dollars less per client in 1981-82 than they did in 1967-68 (\$32 versus \$42),² these efforts are so labor-intensive that the figures probably reflect reduced services more than improved management. Six of the projects in the study received some financial contributions from local sources, but project directors and staff

2. The per client cost for TS projects in 1982 was \$86 without adjusting for inflation. Conversion to compute effects of inflation was based on the Consumer Price Index reported in the October 1982 *Handbook of Basic Economic Statistics* (Bureau of Labor Statistics). Using 1967 as the base year, the formula to convert 1982-83 TS per client costs to 1967 constant dollars was:

$$\frac{\text{Current year Dollars} \times (1967 \text{ Consumer Price Index})}{(1982 \text{ Consumer Price Index})} = \text{Adjusted cost in 1967 dollars.}$$

**Table 3. Average Racial and Ethnic Composition for EOC Projects
in Study Versus All Projects, 1981-82**

	<u>Indian/ Alaskan</u>	<u>Asian/ Pacific</u>	<u>Black</u>	<u>Hispanic</u>	<u>White</u>
Average in Study	1.1%	1.6%	38.2%	2.2%	57.0%
All Projects	2.9%	3.7%	39.9%	15.2%	38.1%

indicated that they could not survive at current operating levels without federal support; six said that their projects would close without federal support.

The size of project staff varies significantly according to the size of federal grants and number of clients served. However, rural projects appear to be relatively understaffed and underfunded. Directors of several rural projects contend that when ED administrators consider grant proposals and determine funding levels, they fail to take into account the size of rural service areas and the dispersion of rural clients.

With one exception, neither TS projects nor EOCs have taken advantage of student interns, work-study/cooperative education students, and other alternative staffing possibilities to compensate for limited professional staff resources.

Educational Opportunity Centers each serve several thousand people annually; ED figures state that the average for all EOCs in 1981-82 was 3,974 clients. EOCs are less likely than TS projects to deliberately focus on a particular racial or ethnic group; they usually extend services to all eligible groups who need their services and are resident in their target communities. Table 3 shows the racial and ethnic composition of the six sample EOCs and of all EOCs in 1981-82.

The clients of EOCs are mostly people 19 years of age or older, which conforms to eligibility criteria established by the Higher Education Amendments of 1980. Nonetheless, all of the EOCs in the study serve some clients under 19 years, as seen in Table 4, because no TS project exists in their service area. The flexibility in the law is especially important for centers that had a pre-1980 tradition of serving large numbers of youth. However, ED has no consistent policy for granting EOCs waivers to serve youth.

Educational Opportunity Center Clients

Table 4. Percentage of Clients by Age Group for Five EOCs in the Study, 1982-83*

	<u>Massachusetts</u>	<u>Washington, DC</u>	<u>NE Pennsylvania</u>	<u>Kentuckiana</u>	<u>Tacoma</u>
High School Students/Graduates/ Dropouts: 18 years old and under	14%	25%	10%	19%	27%
Clients 19 years old and older	86%	75%	90%	81%	73%

*Although there were six EOCs in the study, these data were available only in these five EOCs.

How Educational Opportunity Centers Organize and Deliver Services

EOCs have no uniform package of services for all clients; rather, staff tailor services to an individual client's personal and educational needs. Services tend to cluster around two areas—first, career counseling and second, information, materials, and assistance concerning:

- postsecondary program options;
- the institutions that provide these options;
- admissions; and
- financial aid.

Staff enrich these services to meet individual clients' needs in three ways:

- by providing personal counseling to encourage matriculation;
- by helping them to solve child care, transportation, and other problems; and
- by assisting their entry or re-entry into a postsecondary institution.

Staff see clients on an average of two to three times annually.

EOCs beam their services to the entire community. Centers actively advocate postsecondary education throughout these communities through large-scale campaigns, including mass media efforts, college and job fairs, and public workshops to spread information about educational opportunities, financial aid, and related matters such as careers.

EOC directors are allowed to offer tutoring services for postsecondary students but have drastically reduced these services for financial reasons; nevertheless, four of the six directors interviewed would make tutoring a high priority if additional funds were available.

Since legislation authorizing EOCs specifies only their goals and eligible populations, the centers are organized in varying ways according to local needs. Nonetheless, the study revealed important organizational and financial similarities:

- EOCs are labor-intensive, organized on the principle that a larger staff can help more clients gain access to postsecondary education.
- In 1981-82, all EOCs exceeded the required 25 percent matching funds. They typically met matching requirements through in-kind contributions.
- In no case has federal funding for EOCs kept pace with inflation, even though all EOCs in the study experienced net increases in their federal grants during the four-year period reviewed. Converting 1982-83 grants to 1979 constant dollars shows that each of the sample EOCs actually experienced a 25 percent reduction in real dollar terms.
- Therefore the centers have taken a number of steps to provide adequate services within stringent budget constraints. For example, EOCs have reduced staff, numbers of clients, materials, and telephone and travel expenses. No director believes that his or her center could survive without federal support because local resources are too limited to provide any greater support than they now do.
- The study suggests that—contrary to the negative image of the poverty program leadership of the late 1960s and early 1970s, when EOCs were established—staff in the centers are experienced and well-qualified for their positions, and are employed as cost-effectively as possible for a labor-intensive endeavor. Two-thirds of the counseling staff have master's degrees in counseling or related fields; the balance hold related bachelor's degrees. Professional staff salaries are low, often about \$15,000 annually. Finally, all of the directors have held their positions for most or all of their center's existence.

Table 5 depicts the major differences between the TS projects and the EOCs in the study.

Each of the TS projects in the survey provides a coherent package of services based upon assessed needs of the client group being served. This is done at an extremely low cost per client, less than the real-dollar cost of \$42 in 1967. Each project provides more services than those that are required by the legislative authorization.

The three following descriptions illustrate the range of projects, among several in the study, that exhibited overall effectiveness:

1. Florida A&M. This project primarily serves black high school youth from rural areas and small towns around Tallahassee. Staff recruit low-income sophomores who clearly lack encouragement from home or school to pursue postsecondary education. Clients are provided services through their high school years and until they enter an appropriate postsecondary institution. In 1981-82, 36

How Successful Are Talent Search Projects?

Table 5. How TS Projects and EOC Programs Differ

<u>TS Projects</u>	<u>EOCs</u>
Target youth.	Target adults.
Serve distinct groups most in need of services.	Include whole community within client population.
Typically serve distinct racial/ethnic groups around determined common needs.	Organize and modify services to address needs of individual clients.
Staff focuses on main objectives of increasing high school completion and postsecondary enrollment of clients.	Immediate client needs must often be addressed prior to postsecondary education placement. These needs include job counseling, referral to other agencies for personal or financial support, completion of the GED, etc.
Organize services to meet identified group's needs. All projects provide core services to high school seniors.	Organize resources with optimal flexibility to adapt services to immediate local and individual circumstances.
Maintain close positive ties to the local school system establishment and are visible primarily in the local targeted high schools.	Depend heavily upon ties to a diverse array of agencies and institutions in identifying and serving clients.
Where possible, adhere to a long-term developmental strategy of delivering services.	Organize service to meet immediate and changing needs.

percent of the clients were seniors, nearly 80 percent of whom entered postsecondary institutions—a rate nearly twice that of all seniors in the 22 high schools where the project works.

2. Project STAY, San Antonio, Texas. Begun in 1968, Project STAY is one of the oldest TS projects to assist Hispanic youth. Because there are practically no college guidance services in the 10 high schools in the TS area, the project targets high school seniors (63 percent in 1981–82). Between 25 to 50 percent of the seniors in each target school are clients annually. The project also targets recent graduates (7 percent) and postsecondary dropouts (29 percent). In 1982, Project STAY placed 1,071 students—74.7 percent of the seniors served—in postsecondary education.

3. Vermont Student Assistance Corporation. This organization, which administers financial aid programs statewide, also sponsors a TS project. The project annually serves about a fifth of all eligible students, largely white, in all of the state's high schools, beginning assistance when clients are freshmen or sophomores. In 1981-82, about 40 percent of 1,503 clients were seniors, and a 1982 survey of half the graduating seniors served found 74 percent enrolling in postsecondary education. Of those enrolling in postsecondary education, 70 percent were enrolled in-state, and 56 percent were in four-year degree programs. Among the graduates who did not matriculate, 17 percent were employed, 4 percent entered the Armed Services, and 5 percent were involved in other activities.

EOCs in the study have succeeded in serving large numbers of clients, promoting postsecondary education throughout their communities, providing and often exceeding services required by legislation. Because performance data have greatest utility at the individual project level where collecting and reporting procedures can be determined and data interpreted meaningfully, the study included a detailed analysis of the performances of two centers known to have ample data beyond that reported to the Department of Education. Highlights follow:

1. Washington, D.C., EOC. This EOC serves a predominantly black population, reflecting the demography of the city. In 1981-82, half (1,116) of the "college-ready" clients (a subgroup of seniors and adults with diplomas) enrolled in postsecondary institutions. Another 25 percent were admitted to institutions and were awaiting enrollment for the fall term. EOC staff were also able to obtain services from other agencies for clients that they could not directly assist.

Community activities included an eleventh annual College Day featuring representatives of 100 institutions who met with 4,000 visitors. Eleven special-focus workshops attracted over 300 participants. This EOC also distributed its quarterly newsletter to over 10,000 local residents and promoted and conducted a special radio program on student financial aid that was broadcast throughout the metropolitan area.

2. Massachusetts EOC. This statewide program consists of five individual centers. In 1983, with College Board assistance, the EOC conducted a follow-up study of a representative sample of 168 clients served during 1979-80 who had planned to enroll in college. Ninety-three percent actually had enrolled, and half of those had earned a certificate or degree; another 22 percent were still attending an institution.

The study also found that full-time employment among all the clients increased from 18 to 45 percent. Finally, participation in postsecondary education reduced dependence on welfare among the 96 clients who were independent of parents when they visited the EOC.

How Successful Are Educational Opportunity Centers?

Problems in Reporting and Interpreting Information to Measure Program Effectiveness

Project directors have expressed concern that the number of clients attending selective, high-cost, four-year institutions has been noticeably declining. Given the scarcity of information about financial aid and its importance, they suggest that the decline is due to *perceived* as well as real decreases in financial aid. Clients who might otherwise enroll in high-cost postsecondary institutions read or hear that student aid has suffered drastic cutbacks and become so discouraged about their prospects that they do not even seek help in investigating possibilities of aid.

Success stories notwithstanding, it is difficult to determine the extent of *overall* success of TS and EOC projects. Even the most fundamental data on actual placements of clients in postsecondary education are not available because the Department of Education's performance reporting system is inconsistent. Because of a number of anomalies, projects collect and report enrollment and other data in different ways, producing placement data that are not comparable.

Even in this study, it is impossible to measure aggregate performance of EOCs or of TS efforts across the projects surveyed. Three major deficiencies in the performance reporting system are evident:

1. For EOCs there is no standard definition of "client" for recordkeeping and reporting. No distinction is made, for example, between people who receive community-wide advertisements such as radio broadcasts or who attend college and job fairs, and people who visit the center several times for intensive counseling and guidance. As a result, some projects count clients one way, while other projects count clients by a different method.

2. There is also no way to distinguish between EOC clients who are "college-ready" and those who are unprepared to enroll in college because of work, family responsibilities, or inadequate academic background. Therefore comparative analyses of numbers of clients served and enrolled are marginally useful, at best.

Similarly, for TS projects the Department of Education's reporting system has not differentiated "college-ready" youth (seniors and high school graduates) from those who are not yet of college age—the group that the developmental service strategy targets. Therefore it is impossible to determine the proportion of clients who are of college age who enroll in postsecondary education in a given year.

3. There is no common methodology governing the way that projects report data. For instance, there are no consistent procedures for reporting clients served in the program one year but enrolled in a postsecondary institution the next year. Consequently it is impossible to gauge performance by comparing numbers of clients served with numbers of clients enrolled.

The Continuing Need for Services

The need for support services for disadvantaged youth and adults is likely to grow in the next decade. Recent research has identified several trends that demonstrate how and why growing numbers of low-income and minority students lack information and support networks that are crucial in assuring access to postsecondary education (Sayre 1980). The theme underlying these trends is that low-income youth, their parents, and low-income adults (especially those who would be the first generation to attend college) do not know what middle class people and college-educated families already take for granted about a college education: its advantages, its availability, its offerings, its requirements, its nature—in short, its potential value to them immediately and over time, both in their personal lives and in their employment. In particular, the disadvantaged often do not know about or understand financial aid programs, and fail to consider higher education because they assume they cannot afford it (Peng, Fetter, and Kolstad 1981).

Research indicates four significant trends that underscore the need for information, counseling, encouragement, and other support services that enable disadvantaged youth and adults to participate in higher education:

1. At each level of ability, disadvantaged students are least likely to attend college; disadvantaged high school graduates are half as likely to attend as graduates who are not disadvantaged economically or educationally (Gruss and Hauptman 1984).
2. Since the mid-1970s, the rate of college enrollment among minorities has declined: 1981 enrollment of college-aged blacks was down about 10 percent from 1974 (Applied Systems Institute 1983); in the past decade the enrollment percentages of Hispanics, the nation's fastest-growing ethnic group, have decreased (Gruss and Hauptman 1984).
3. The proportion of the traditional-aged cohort of college students who are ethnic and racial minorities will increase until at least 1990 (Hodgkinson 1983).
4. Adults lack information about colleges and financial aid. Low-income and racial minority adults especially need information, counseling, and other support services to capitalize on educational opportunities (Arbeiter 1978).

College guidance services for the disadvantaged are not a priority on current agendas for long-range, costly reform of the nation's public schools, and it is unlikely that secondary schools that serve disadvantaged students will soon adequately identify and guide all able, low-income youth toward postsecondary education. Schools operating on tight budgets will be prone to focus resources on those most likely to graduate. Therefore, cost-efficient services coordinated with but located and funded outside the school system can effectively focus resources on assisting disadvantaged youth in ways that the school system cannot yet provide.

No matter how much or how soon high school counseling services may be improved, adults would still have no equivalent source of information and support services. Educational Opportunity Centers address this need.

In summary, throughout nearly two decades of assisting disadvantaged youth and adults to prepare for and enroll in postsecondary education, TS projects and EOCs have delivered their services in an increasingly strategic, cost-effective, and professional manner. The clients and services of TS projects and EOCs differ significantly. However, within each program there are commonalities, such as the core services that TS projects deliver to seniors. Both programs have addressed major obstacles to their diverse clients' access to higher education through a variety of means adapted to particular local circumstances and individual needs.

Because of inadequate data, the type of definitive evaluation these programs deserve is not possible. Yet there is a persistent and increasing need for such services across the country, a need that is unlikely to be met through any other approach. This study indicated that a consistent and comprehensive approach to gathering evidence across projects would strengthen the case for continuing support of these programs and would reveal ways to improve service delivery.

Recommendations

Based upon the above findings, the following recommendations are aimed at improving the operation of the Talent Search and Educational Opportunity Center programs. We address recommendations separately to the Congress, the U.S. Department of Education, and project administrators.

1. Continue the program authority for both Talent Search and Educational Opportunity Centers.

Both programs serve large numbers of low-income and first-generation-in-college students at low costs per client. Both provide a range of services that exceed their legislative mandates. Despite weaknesses in ED's performance reporting systems, the programs appear highly successful in helping clients to enter postsecondary institutions.

2. Increase appropriations for TS and EOC programs.

Inflation and declining levels of state and federal grants are forcing TS and EOC projects to reduce services. Higher appropriations would enable projects to sustain the level and quality of services as well as their numbers of clients.

3. Retain organizational flexibility that allows individual EOCs to serve eligible youth when no TS project exists in the local service area, and TS projects to serve adults when no EOC exists.

The separate targeting by TS projects and EOCs that was stipulated by the Education Amendments of 1980 seems to be working. Flexibility for individual projects is particularly appropriate and useful for EOCs, which have traditionally extended their services, regardless of age, to all low-income people in the target communities.

1. Develop uniform procedures and practices for communicating policy and operational directives to the projects, particularly EOCs.

EOCs particularly appear to receive inconsistent direction from the Department of Education. Directors of projects also indicate that Department of Education officials interpret policy differently to individual projects. The resulting confusion leads projects to operate under different assumptions about the Department's expectations in some policy and program areas.

2. Develop a uniform procedure for granting individual projects a waiver for serving youth (EOCs) and adults (TS).

The most straightforward and least costly procedure would be to have waiver requests included as a section in the projects' annual work statements. No arbitrary restrictions should be included; each request should be considered on its merits.

3. In funding existing TS and EOC projects, recognize effects of inflation and static grant sizes.

These programs are extremely labor-intensive and have recently begun to reduce services. If new funds do not become available, inflation will continue to erode basic service capabilities. Individual projects should then be allowed and even encouraged to

To the Congress

To the U.S.
Department of
Education

adjust their organization and delivery of services. Depending upon their local circumstances and needs, projects could reduce the number of clients served or reduce the scope of services. For example, a TS project director faced with severely curtailed resources might reasonably decide that the project must continue to serve the optimal possible number of clients in the local schools but that staff must reduce the number of times they see each client. On the other hand, another project might preserve the quality of their early intervention services by reducing services provided to seniors and recent graduates.

4. Recognize the distinct features of rural-based projects when allocating funds.

Rural projects cannot operate at the same per-client costs as urban projects. Because clients are dispersed widely throughout extraordinarily large service areas, requiring special staffing patterns and high costs for telephone and travel, rural projects have relatively greater financial needs.

5. If sufficient funds do become available to support additional TS and EOC projects, priority should be given to projects that propose to serve significant numbers of Hispanic clients.

Hispanics are relatively underrepresented among the clients of both TS projects and EOCs. Moreover, the relative number of Hispanics served within both programs has recently declined.

6. Overhaul the performance reporting systems for both EOC and TS programs and involve representatives of the TS and EOC communities in the process.

These programs need uniform requirements and reporting methodology that yield accurate data yet are cost-efficient and minimally burdensome to the projects. Current systems meet none of these criteria.

Priority should be given to defining client populations clearly. For example, TS projects operate by the rule that potential clients must be "touched twice" by individual staff before they can be counted. Such a criterion is vastly preferable to one in which everyone in an auditorium who is exposed to an announcement about services is counted.

Individual projects should emphasize the total number of clients served, the number of clients served who are "college-ready," and the number of the "college-ready" who are admitted to postsecondary institutions. Actual client enrollments might also be included as a structured sample of those admitted.

In the absence of a cost-efficient, simplified process, ED might contract with an outside organization capable of developing and operating a national performance system and collecting comparable data on the postsecondary enrollment of TS and EOC clients.

To the Projects

1. Get involved directly in revamping ED's performance reporting systems.

Improving the reporting systems must be top priority among all projects. Without reliable data across programs, understanding of the actual and potential importance of TS and EOC programs will continue to be limited. Furthermore, the programs will have no objective information for improving operations. Most recently, ED has

weakened the reporting system for TS and EOCs, requiring only a five-page narrative statement instead of data or numerical goals. At the very least, projects should respond with as much data as they can gather in such a report.

2. *Develop a forum or mechanism for sharing exemplary service practices and solving common operational problems.*

Special sessions of the National Council of Educational Opportunity Associations' Annual Conference and/or of regional association conferences should be established. Sessions could focus on such topics as effective service techniques for specific subpopulations of clients, selection and use of career inventories and tests, and ways to improve recordkeeping.

3. *Explore alternative staffing patterns.*

Consider, for example, using student interns and peer counselors to augment full-time staff. Such low-cost and potentially effective alternatives have not been well-utilized either in TS projects or in EOCs.

4. *Use admission, financial aid, testing, and other fee waivers for clients more extensively.*

The frequent use of waivers by some projects and low use by others suggests that some projects do not take full advantage of the opportunities.

5. *Strengthen efforts to enroll clients in four-year colleges and universities.*

A general pattern of low and declining enrollment among low-income and minority students in four-year colleges is reflected among TS and EOC clients. Although TS projects and EOCs encourage their clients to pursue a range of postsecondary options, the enrollment of minorities and disadvantaged people in low-cost, two-year institutions is disproportionate.

This pattern is so widespread that it is clearly not peculiar to TS projects or EOCs. Project directors are concerned that the relative number of clients attending selective, high-cost, four-year institutions is declining due to perceived as well as real decreases in financial aid. Assuming that their judgment is accurate, TS projects and EOCs should concentrate efforts to heighten clients' awareness of their ability to enter four-year institutions and to assist them in gaining admission and obtaining suitable financial aid.

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Appendix

Lists of Sample Talent Search Projects and Educational Opportunity Centers

Sample Talent Search Projects

Project	Sponsoring Institution Agency	Year Project Started	Client Orientation
Vermont Student Assistance Corporation, Burlington, VT	public, nonprofit	1969-70	State-wide, rural, white high school students
Columbia University New York, New York	4-year, private university	1977-78	Urban, black high school students
Wytheville Community College Wytheville, VA	2-year, public college	1976-77	Rural, small town, white, young adult high school dropouts
Florida A&M Tallahassee, FL	4-year, public university	1979-80	50% rural, balance small and large city. 70% black high school students
Cuyahoga Community College Cleveland, OH	2-year, public college	1967-68	Urban, black high school students and young adult graduates
Project STAY San Antonio, TX	Self-incorporated nonprofit	1968-69	Urban, Chicano high school students
Wichita State University Wichita, KS	4-year, public university	1977-78	Predominantly urban, mixed black, white junior high and high school students
University of Wyoming Laramie, WY	4-year, public university	1976-77	Rural high school students; mixed Native American, white, Hispanic
LULAC National Educational Service Center Colorado Center Colorado Springs, CO	public, nonprofit	1973-74	Small to large cities; Hispanic high school students
Asian American Communities for Education San Francisco, CA	private, nonprofit	1979-80	Urban high school students, 60% Asians
Idaho State University Pocatello, ID	4-year, public university	1968-69	Rural, small town; 57% high school students; 60% white; 37% Hispanic

Sample Educational Opportunity Centers

Project	Sponsoring Institution Agency	Year Project Started	Client Orientation
Massachusetts EOC Worcester, MA	Worcester Consortium of Higher Education, nonprofit	1974-75	Statewide project serving urban, suburban; 70% white; 20% black; historical adult orientation
Washington, DC EOC Washington, DC	The College Board, nonprofit	1976-77*	Urban, black; 50-55% clients historically high school students; 75% 19 or over in 1982-83
EOC of Northeastern Pennsylvania Wilkes-Barre, PA	Self-incorporated, nonprofit	1979-80	Small city and rural; white; historically over 19 years of age
Kentuckiana Metroversity EOC Louisville, KY	Kentuckiana Metroversity, nonprofit	1977-78	Urban and surrounding rural areas; historically 50% over 19; 1982-83 over 80% adult; mixed black and white
Metropolitan St. Louis EOC St. Louis, MO	Higher Education Center of St. Louis	1974-75	Urban; 60% black and 40% white; historically serves adults
Educational Opportunity Resource Center Tacoma, WA	Metropolitan Development Council, nonprofit	1974-75	Urban and surrounding suburban and rural areas; predominantly white, mixed high school and adults, historically over 75% 19 or over

*Project began as Talent Search in 1967-68 and converted to EOC in 1976-77.

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